

Directive 163.1
3/12/85

NEWS RELEASES

I. PURPOSE

This Directive:

- A. States U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) policy on the release of information to the news media and the public.
- B. Establishes guidelines for news release information.
- C. Sets deadlines for the submission of news release material.
- D. Authorizes specialists to furnish oral information to news media.

II. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces AMS/FGIS Instruction 163-1, Rev. 3, News Releases, dated 9-10-82.

III. DEPARTMENT POLICY

A. General. USDA policy is to report information regarding USDA programs to farmers, other specifically affected groups and the general public using channels normally available to those for whom the information is intended. The Office of Governmental and Public Affairs (OGPA) is responsible for carrying out this policy. The Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs has final review of all information materials prepared by agencies, and represents USDA with other Federal and State agencies on information matters. News releases should:

- 1. Be impersonal and institutional.
- 2. Avoid personal publicity.
- 3. Wherever possible, provide basic factual information on authorized programs for further adaptation and localization by communication media and localized agencies.

B. Availability of Information. USDA makes available information on its activities to representatives of communication media, individuals, organizations and Members of Congress, except where prohibited by legal or other restrictions.

INF/AMS

C. Release of Information to the News Media. OGPA is the official medium through which material is released to the news media and, in cooperation with agencies, is responsible for:

- 1. Carrying out USDA policy in its relations with representatives of the news media.
- 2. Gaining maximum coverage and support for USDA programs by:
 - a. Choosing the most effective method of presenting the facts.

- b. Deciding on the timing of news releases.
- c. Distributing news releases.
- d. Clearing and furnishing photographs, charts, maps and other illustrative materials to the news media.

IV.
AMS POLICY

AMS policy is to:

- A. Cooperate fully with OGPA in carrying out USDA information policy.
- B. Follow USDA policy and regulations in submitting materials to OGPA for release to the public through news media.

C. Issue news releases or summaries on every significant AMS action, specifically including, but not limited to:

Standards - when notice of intent (prenotice) is given on possible revision of standards or issuance of new standards; when a formal proposal is issued and published in the Federal Register; when a proposal is revised; when a final action is issued.

2. Inspection, Grading and Classing - when changes are proposed; when standards are instituted; when services are withdrawn; when licenses are suspended for cause or reinstated; when infractions of law are settled; when Federal fees are changed.

3. Market News - when substantial program changes, including initiation- of significant new reports, are made; when major offices are opened or closed.

4. Milk Marketing Orders - when each step of the rulemaking procedure to establish a new milk order or amend an existing one is taken; when significant infractions of law are settled in court cases.

Page 2

5. Fruit and Vegetable and Other Marketing Orders when each step of the procedure to initiate a new or amend an existing order is taken; when market regulations are proposed and when issued by USDA; when appointments are made to administrative committees; when court judgments are issued or settlements made on marketing order violations. .-

6. Research and Promotion Programs - when an order is proposed and hearing scheduled; when each step of procedure to initiate or amend an order is taken; when regulations and rules of practice are proposed and issued; when members to an administrative board or committee are named; when a proposed budget is approved by USDA, unless directed otherwise by the Administrator; when court judgments are issued or settlements are made on violations.

7. Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act - when changes in the regulations are contemplated, proposed and

issued; when reparation awards are issued; when there is payment or failure to pay reparation awards; when disciplinary actions, including fines, suspensions and revocations of licenses are taken; when court cases are settled; when employee bonds are posted.

8. Federal Seed Act - when changes in the regulations are contemplated, proposed and issued; when there are seizures of seed; when cases filed in court are settled, either by court action or by compromise; when cases are settled under Debt Collection Act.

9. Plant Variety Protection Act - when regulations or changes in regulations are contemplated, proposed and issued; when certificates of protection are granted; when cases filed in court are settled by court action or compromise.

10. Agricultural Fair Practices Act - when recommendations for prosecution of a case are made; when settlements are made by court or by agreement.

11. Grants in Aid - when money grants are made to States, agencies or others to conduct marketing projects.

12. Advisory Committees, Boards or Task Forces - when committees, boards or task forces are established, reestablished or terminated; when members are named; when final reports by committees, boards or task forces are issued; when meetings are to be held; after meetings are held (a news media briefing or question and answer period may follow each meeting instead of or in addition to the news release).

13. Research Reports - when published to highlight principal findings.

Page 3

D. News releases are not issued on cases that have been settled under laws administered by other agencies or departments even though they may relate to AMS programs or result from investigations by AMS.

A. The Information (INF) Staff administers a comprehensive information program necessary to meet requirements of the overall programs and activities of AMS. Within the framework of USDA and AMS policy, the INF Staff coordinates programs for release of information to the public through news media with OGPA and other departments, Federal and State agencies. The INF Staff shall:

1. Write each news release with the aid of material or information supplied by program divisions.
2. Represent AMS in its relations with OGPA.
3. Cooperate with OGPA in the release of current information to the news media by:

- a. Insuring the news release is written in a forth-right and clear way using newspaper style and language the

average reader will understand, and contains essential, meaningful and accurate information about the action or event covered.

b. Obtaining appropriate AMS approval and clearance of releases.

c. Furnishing or suggesting suitable photographs, charts, maps or other illustrative material to accompany news releases or for distribution to the news media.

d- Observing deadlines and other procedures established by OGPA.

4. Make certain that all news media have an equal opportunity to obtain information regarding significant developments in all phases of AMS work by preparing releases to be issued:

a. Simultaneously, through established USDA channels, to all news outlets.

b. To a suitable outside medium of communication (after approval by the Assistant Secretary, OGPA) if the program or subject is highly technical or of interest to a limited audience.

Page 4

B. Program Divisions and offices shall:

1. Provide the INF Staff sufficient and accurate material for the preparation of news releases including copies of specific dockets and materials to be published in the Federal Register.

2. Inform the INF Staff of the developments in program operations as far in advance as possible.

3. Assist the INF Staff in obtaining all information needed to prepare a complete news release.

4. Observe submission deadlines to assure timely release and effective use of information given in Section VI, below.

5. Review proposed releases for accuracy before the INF Staff submits them to the Administrator for review and for forwarding to OGPA for approval.

C. Program Division Directors shall:

1. Approve news releases relating to work of their division.

2. Assure that the release is accurate, complete and points out the effect on farmers and consumers, when appropriate.

D. The Director, INF Staff, shall:

1. Determine the most effective method of presenting the facts in news releases.

2. Approve news releases after clearance by program Division Directors.

3. Submit approved releases to the Administrator for

clearance and obtain clearances with other agencies, when needed.

4. Assign a release date to each regional release and coordinate dissemination after AMS approval.
5. Issue regional releases as authorized by OGPA.

E. The Administrator shall:

1. Approve news releases after clearance by program Division Directors and INF Staff.

Page 5

2. Resolve any conflicts between Divisions, including conflicts between the INF Staff and program divisions as to the content or wording of a news release.

VI. The deadline for submission of news releases is as follows:
SUBMISSION

DEADLINES FOR
NEWS RELEASES

- A. Divisions and offices shall submit news release information for news releases to the INF Staff at least 1 day in advance so the INF Staff may:
1. Draft and edit the release, type clean copies, and obtain approvals of the release within AMS.
 2. Deliver the release to OGPA before 12 noon, which is generally the deadline for receiving releases proposed for issuance the same day. Releases reaching OGPA after 12 noon are likely to be held for release the following day. Friday releases should be avoided when possible.

B. OGPA requires releases by 12 noon in order to:

1. Allow time to clear or review releases with appropriate members of the Office of the Secretary, and process and issue releases by 3:30 p.m.
2. Give news correspondents the service they should have from USDA.
3. Permit USDA information to compete more effectively with other news emanating from Washington.
4. Allow reporters sufficient time to contact Department specialists for additional background information required to develop stories.

VII.
RELEASE OF
INFORMATION

- A. OGPA will notify INF Staff of the time set for issuance of the news release.
- B. The INF Staff will notify the originating Division and any other interested divisions or offices of the time the release will be issued.
- C. Divisions and offices will not disclose the content of a news release to the public or to any trade or industry organization until actual release

to the news media.

Page 6

VIII.
INTERVIEWS WITH
REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE MEDIA

Representatives of newspapers and magazines often wish to obtain, by interview, further information direct from specialists who are best qualified to supply accurate details or background for expanded stories. Interviews are encouraged, but, in talking to the news media, employees shall not discuss:

A. Department-wide policy or the work of another agency without proper clearance and prior approval of the materials.

B. Program material or significant agency developments that have not been released through proper channels.

C. Topics such as political or budgetary matters that, under existing laws or regulations, could not be announced in official releases

James C. Handley
Administrator

Distribution: G07

Originating Office: Public Affairs Staff

-
- [Return](#) to the AMS Issuances Table of Contents
 - [Return](#) to the AMS Issuances Homepage
-